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Storytelling in Destination Brand Communication: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Stories help consumers to make sense of the product and/or services in marketing and branding. Especially in tourism, storytelling is an effective channel for destination brand communication. Stories are powerful because they turn myths into tangible consumer experience creators; they provide insights and encourage learning. Tourists have always needed myths-stories with attractive plots and characters to make sense of the tourism destination. So it's important to have portfolio of attractive, positive stories and effective storytelling channels in destination brand communication for any destination brand. In this paper, certain stories derived from a formerly conducted research about a city destination were investigated. Data were derived from the stories by using qualitative approach based on content analysis. Word counting, classification and labeling techniques were utilized. The analyses yielded plots, themes that were connected with the destination brand. The plots/themes included wide range of linkages reflects positive and/or negative sentiments. Also, various attractive characters, places, beliefs, phenomenon, experience etc. were raised related with the destination brand as a result of analyses. After all, "Objects" and "locality" themes put forward. The results have represented a concentrated summary of the meanings subject to able to use in destination brand communication utilizable by tour guides, destination developers, marketers and brand managers.

Keywords: marketing, destination branding, brand communication, storytelling, tourism

Introduction

Strategically structured and successfully activated destination branding application supports value, reputation and competitive power of any destination. A destination brand includes tangible and intangible qualities that create brand value. This is important to show both how a destination

functions and how it is perceived, externally and internally. Besides tangible qualities like natural beauties, historic places, monuments, etc.; intangible qualities like stories makes destination brand different, valuable and positively perceived as well.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how stories related with a destination by effecting the destination brand development and brand communication. The paper presents the results of qualitative analysis on the issue of destination stories in Turkey and a case study regarding a significant experience of destination brand communication in Adana city.

The research methodology allows to show a picture of storytelling way to develop Adana destination brand communication in tourism sector, and to understand the role of destination brand. In this manner, brand can ease decision making, represents quality assurance, and offers a different, credible and relevant choice among competing offerings in Turkey. The paper can be considered a starting point for further investigations on “storytelling in destination branding” topic. The study can be found useful for destination developer, destination brand managers, destination marketers, tourist guides and other practitioners who want to go through innovation in destination brand communication.

Literature Review

The main issue in this paper is “destination branding”. Destination branding has become a noteworthy issue in recent years. Destination branding can be defined as a way to communicate a destination’s unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Morrison & Anderson, 2002). Cai (2002) defines destination branding as “selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building. A brand element comes in the form of a name, term, logo, sign, design, symbol, slogan, package, or a combination of these, of which the name is the first and foremost reference” (p. 722).

Cai (2002) seems to point out that the brand name for destination is often fixed but the use of slogans and symbols is utilized to communicate the name of the destination with associated benefits (Daye, 2010). Cai (2002) also seems to focus on the tangible elements of the branding process. On the other hand, Schmitt and Simonsen (1997) and Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott (2002) point to the presence of both functional and emotional values to differentiate product and destination brands from generic products and services.

Brands are means to differentiate from the competitors, or future competitors (Balmer & Gray, 2003). “The concept of destination branding is critical for a destination to be identified and differentiated from alternatives in the minds of the target market” (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011, p. 465).

Destination brand focuses on the whole destination and it is about local people living in destination, tourism personnel, tangible and intangible values, practices, events and processes of destination. Like corporate brand, destination brand is a kind of organization brand (Aaker, 2004). Destination branding must be made very carefully because the brand is the identifier of the destination and is used to support destination communication.

Destination brand communicates expectations of what the destination will deliver in terms of products, services, and tourist/visitor/customer experience. Destination brand is the amalgam of

the values which stands for the destination. Destination brand come into existence from the messages issued by the destination stakeholders. Destination brand is the promise of a specific consumer/visitor/tourist experience (Schmitt, 1999). Brand is the system of signs that express the destination organization: “the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of a destination’s unique business model” (Knox & Bickerton, 2003, p. 1013). According to Balmer (2004), brands are constituted by three elements: values, promises and behavior. So, destination branding gives competitive advantage to destination, and maintains a consistency between the values of the destination brand, their explicit communication and the experience created by the stakeholders.

The second issue in this paper is “stories” related with a destination branding, and “storytelling” as a tool for destination branding. Stories are such a common part of our lives that it is sometimes easy to overlook their central role in the way we communicate with each other, understand and make sense of the world and its events, and store our memories (Moscardo, 2010). The objective of this study is to open a road for studying the possibilities of using storytelling as a means of developing and marketing a destination brand.

In Baker’s (2007) word, “since people first sat around a fire and recounted their hunting expeditions, stories have been used as a means of entertainment, engagement, instruction, and communication. Today, by tapping into the power of storytelling, brand marketers can inject greater meaning and emotion into their brands. The power of storytelling has often been undervalued in tourism and destination marketing.” (p. 134). When people are personally connected through a story, they are more likely to remember the experience (Simmons, 2001). Therefore, destination brand managers can use positive stories to attract tourists. In their study, Black and Kelley (2009) mention several specific storytelling elements. These elements have listed in the study as trust, character development, detail, tone of superiority, inspirational content, and quality of writing.

Methodology

Sample

The universe of research includes historical, mythological, epic or fantastic stories told about Adana in time. Every single story contains themes, positive and/or negative sentiments, characters, places, beliefs, phenomenon, experience, meanings, exciting aspects, motivative aspects, unique qualities etc. related with Adana destination. The research sample is obtained from a story competition which conducted in Adana city. Stories sended to this competition are sourced by people living in Adana.

Data collection

Data were derived from the stories by using qualitative approach based on content analysis. Research questions are employed to derive data systematically from sample material (stories). Content tables are used to reveal answers for research questions for every single story. In interpreting data in content table classification and labeling techniques were utilized.

Data Source

Competition stories that data source of this research examined under interdiscipliner point of view and 26 stories that suitable for aim of this research are included in the analysis section.

Empirical Model

In the study, “scanning model” with qualitative analysis is preferred. With qualitative analysis, contents like themes, positive and/or negative sentiments, characters, places, beliefs, phenomena, experiences, meanings, exciting, motivative and unique aspects etc. in the Adana stories are tried to reveal and determine clearly.

Qualitative analysis is one of the ways of knowledge production procedures to understand life styles, stories, behaviours, organizational structures and sociological change of people (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because the aim in the qualitative analysis is gathering detailed knowledge about person, subject, case or circumstance that form the present research topic and for about a certain objective, purposive sampling is used in qualitative analysis (Maxwell, 1996). Although it necessitates a complicated procedures and competent research talents, qualitative analysis allows to being wisely understand meanings reserved in the matter of fact. Instead of quantitative analysis, the variables are being deeply examined in the qualitative analysis. Nevertheless, various tabling methods can be used to derive datas in a systematic manner in present examination. In this study, a raw data table is created for every single story. The content analysis which is one of the methods of qualitative research is implemented to datas by “scanning model”.

Content analysis is a method mainly used to analyze verbal and visual datas. Researcher primarily develops categories related with research topic in content analysis. Thereafter, researcher counts words, sentences or pictures associated with categories (Silverman, 2001). In other words, content analysis can be determined as procedure of summarizing and specifying messages in verbal knowledge (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Another motivation for using content analysis as a qualitative analysis technique in present study is the usage of stories like any other (newspapers, achieves, court decisions, articles, novels stc.) verbal data materials. In present study, it is aimed to systematically examine and compile meaningful knowledge that can be used in brand communication activities of Adana destination by conducting content analysis on Adana stories.

Certain research questions developed to compile meaningful knowledge. These questions are given below:

1. Who are the prominent characters in Adana stories?
2. Where are the prominent places in Adana stories?
3. Which meanings and experiences are transmitted to visitors by Adana stories?
4. What are the prominent objects in Adana stories?

Thereafter, under meaningful categories of the knowledges derived by research questions is coded. Word counting (understanding repetition times of every single code), appreciation analysis (understanding positive or negative meaning of every single code) and relation analysis (understanding thematic relation structure between any pair of codes) techniques are utilized in all these procedures of content analysis.

Findings

The stories examined in compliance with research questions. Datas and objects compiled from every single story summarized under categories in Table 1 in compliance with aim of the study.

Then, data summarized in these categories allocated to subgroups pursuant to their meanings. Primarily, word counting procedure conducted to findings on Table 1. Thematic groups have listed in Table 1 in compliance with their observation scores. Observation scores can be seen on rightside of each word in Table 2. Lastly, thematic groups constituted have being labelled. The procedure conducted above has revealed meaningful conclusions facilitating to determine brand theme. Conclusions about procedure embracing word counting, classification and labeling summarized in Table 2.

According to Table 2, categories revealed from Adana stories to use in destination brand communication can be listed as objects, meaning-experience, places and characters. In other words, destination stories put forward objects dominates other categories according to observation scores. Meaning-experience, places ve characters come respectively after objects category.

When examined thematically, themes under these categories can be labeled as “locality”, “historical, trade and logistics center”, “intangible cultural heritage”, “health (3rd age) tourism”, “romantism”, “architecture” and “gastronomy and entertainment”. Above themes has listed maximum scores to minimum scores produced from word counting scores. In other words, using “locality” or a theme reflecting local original/unique/genuine/distinctive qualities in destination brand communication is much more favourable than others.

However, any above theme reached to aggrement strategically by destination stakeholders can be said to put forward in Adana destination brand communication implementations. Because, desire and expectation of target groups demanding the destination or demanded by the destination to pull is one of the most determinative factors in constituting and implementing destination brand communication.

Recognizing the importance of storytelling and its implications in this study may lead to a strategic tool and advantage for destinations. From a marketing perspective, destinations might use elements of a story in their promotional materials. Destinations might also use the proliferation of internet tools to reach customers for sharing strong elements of stories.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

No	Characters	Places	Meaning-Experience	Objects
1	Lovers	Stonebridge, Kozan	Love, meeting point	Blue rose, beautiful girl
2	Ataturk	Big Clocktower,	Arrival message of saviour	Big Clocktower
3	Elderly tourists	Karatas beaches, Sea	Rejuvenation, romantism, taste	Fish, beach
4	Aslamaci	Stonebridge, Seyhan river, Smallclock, Kazancilar, Ulu Mosque, Ramazanoglu mansion, Girls high school	taste, eating, drinking, resting, diverse view points and listening to yourself	Bird, historical plant pipe, salgam, Turkish delight, palm tree, aslama
5	Kennedy (JFK) American, Cyprus, NATO, USA soldiers.	Stonebridge, Ironbridge, Girne bridge, Kennedy bridge, Incirlik, Seyhan river	Reaction of nationalist Adana people	Bridge
6	Bully, Melez Ahmet, Ince Cumali, Jilet Recai, Kamcili, Kel Hasan, Irgat	Big Clocktower, Yag Mosque, Kazancilar, Bebekli Church, Peasant bazaar	bravery, just, being good person, dignified, knight errant	Coffeshop (kahvehane), boiler, Big Clocktower
7		Aden, Adn, Aden paradise, rivers	Beauty and peace, Adana=Aden paradise	Seyhan river, garden, trees, green
8	Brave men, beautiful girls, stone masters	Anavarza, Sis, Misis	intelligence, love, passion and sadness	Festival, aquaduct, castle walls
9	Ataturk	Adana	Indepence, idea of freedom arise from Adana	Ataturk
10	Bosnian Salih Effendi, Ataturk, Celal Bayar	Bosnian Salih Effendi Mansion, Stonebridge	Philanthropic, believer, patriotic, elegance, hospitable, scene	Silver tea set, plain, tea, snake (mansion with snake)
11	Landlord, landlord daughter, sheperd	Pozanti, bridestones, Ciftehan	Love, abduction of girl, landlordness	Marriage portion, rock figure
12	Peddler Yusuf, Peddler, master of physician Lokman Hekim	Misis, Misis bridge	healing, Adana is/has remedy	Medicinal plant, elixir (bottle)
13		Kurukopru, Bahripasha fontain,	water, bridge, connector	Bahripasha fontain
14	Lokman Hekim, Hizir Aleyhisselam	Taurus, Highlands, Misis bridge	immortality, healing, rehabilitation, health	Immortality elixir (bottle), orange blossom
15	Lokman Hekim	Misis, Cukurova, Misis bridge	Recovery from disease, immortality, health	Immortality herb, flowers, herbs, Misis bridge
16	Lokman hekim, Legendary doctor	Misis	Medicine and pharmacy, healing, health	Bowl, snake symbols
17	Sahmeran (legendary creature)	Misis, Yilancastle	Fear of lost, mythology	Snake, Sahmeran, wind, water

No	Characters	Places	Meaning-Experience	Objects
18	grandfather, Grandchild, Mother		Love, declaration of love, inspiration, beautiful Adana, colorful Adana	Rainbow, my Adana
19		Sular district, river	Bridge has no water underneath, water has formed Adana	Kurukopru, water
20	Lovers, princess	Stonebridge	Love, bridge that brings lovers together	Taskopru, Stonebridge, beautiful girl, snake, Seyhan river
21	Emperor, architect	Stonebridge	Bridge that brings to banks together, dreaming	Gold, arches of Taskopru
22	Traders, Marko Polo, Poems, Architect Oksenteus, Ziya Pasha	Stonebridge	Brings together civilizations, pass, trade, theatre, festival place	Bridge that brings together civilizations, vessels, trade, silk, carpet, fabric, bazaar, river, caravan
23	Tinsmith, Kirve	Kazancilar, bazaar, highland	Love, orange blossom, faith, fortune-telling, pray, woodoo	Cotton, fortune-telling, birds
24	Vali Ziya Pasha, Abdulhamit	Ziya Pasha Park, Stonebridge, Misis	Education, theatre, poem, author, statesman, governor of Adana	Printing press, newspaper, waterwheel (mavra)
25	Germans, Abdulhamit the 2 nd	Varda bridge, German bridge, Istanbul, The Hejaz	Natural wonder, scene, magnificien bridge	Varda Bridge
26	Refuse collector	Istanbul	Adana language, water polo, swimming	Refuse, refuse tip

Table 2: Word Counting, Classification and Labeling

Plots	Characters	Places	Meaning-Experience	Objects	Total
Locality	19: Aslamaci1, laborar1, stone masters1, refuse collector1, sheperd1, peddler2, bully7, tinsmith1, traders1, poems1, soldiers1, kirve1	22: Kurukopru1, Ziya Pasha Park1, Kazancilar (boiler makers)3, peasant bazaar1, Sular district1, Incirlik1, Kozan1, Sis1, Misis9, Adana1, Taurus1, Cukurova 1	32: governors1, poems1, author1, reaction of nationalist Adana people1, brave1, just1, good person1, honorable1, knight errant1, diverse1, intelligent1, passionate1, sad1, independent1, liberalistic1, philanthropic1, believer1, patriot1, elegant1, hospitable1, landlord1, Adana8, beautiful Adana1, colourful Adana1, natural wonder1	11: Kurukopru1, rainbow1, fortune-telling (Turkish coffee cup)1, printing press1, newspaper1, refuse1, magnificent bridge1, Adana language1, swimming1, spices1, colourful Adana1	84
Historical, Trade and Logistics Center	18: Bosnian Salih Effendi1, Ataturk3, Celal Bayar1, landlord2, Kennedy (JFK)1, Marco Polo1, Architect Oksenteus2,	5: Istanbul2, German Bridge1, Hejaz railroad1, Ironbridge1	7: brings civilizations together1, gateway1, trade2, bazar1, marketplace1, bridge that brings civilizations together1	32: Ataturk1, silver1, gold1, vessles1, silk1, carpet1, fabric1, caravan1, cotton1, bridge22, Marco Polo1	62

Plots	Characters	Places	Meaning-Experience	Objects	Total
Intangible Cultural Heritage	governor Ziya Pasha1, Abdulhamit2, Americans2, Germans1, traders1 12: Lokman Hekim4, Hizir Aleyhisselam1, Sahmeran1, emperor1, tinsmith1, stone masters1, Aslamaci1, peddler2	10: Aden2, Adn1, Aden Paradise1, Pozanti bride stone1, mosques2, Ulu(grand) Mosque1, Bebekli Church1, Yag (oliveoil) Mosque1	28: Adana=Aden Paradise1, immortality2, fear of lost1, mythology1, bridge that brings lovers together1, bridge that brings two banks together1, abduction of girl1, arrival message of saviour1, bridge4, connector4, healing4, health4, faith1, fortune-telling1, woodoo1	10: immortality elixir1, herbs3, flowers2, Sahmeran1, marriage portion1, rockfigure1, orange blossom	60
Health (3rd Age) Tourism	10: elderly tourists1, grandfather1, grandchild1, mother1, Lokman Hekim4, peddler2	5: Karatas beaches1, sea1, Ciftehan1, highlands2	17: rejuvenation1, immortality2, listening yourself1, beauty and peace1, healing Adana1, rehabilitation5, health4, medicine1, pharmacy1	18: herbs3, elixir (bottle)1, immortality elixir (bottle)1, elixir2, orange blossom1, immortality herb1, flowers2, bowl1, snake6	54
Romance	7: lovers2, beautiful girl3, landlord's daughter1, princess1	7: Karatas beaches1, sea1, Seyhanriver4, plain1	17: love7, meetingpoint1, scene2, romanticism1, abduction of girl1, decleration of love1, inspiration1, beauty1, dreaming1, education1	20: blue rose1, beach1, bird2, palm tree1, Seyhan river3, garden1, trees1, green1, water9	51
Architecture	5: stone masters1, architect2, Architect Oksenteus2	24: Taskopru (Stonebridge)7, Buyuksaat (Big clocktower)1, Ulu Mosque1, Kucuksaat (smallclock)1, Ramazanoglu mansion1, girls high school1, Girne bridge1, Kennedy bridge1, Misis bridge3, Bebekli Church1, Bosnian Salih Effendi Mansion1, Yag Mosque1, Yilankale (snakecastle)1, Bahripasha fountain1, Varda Bridge1, Anavarza castle1		13: Varda Bridge1, stonebridge3, Misis bridge1, Bahripasha fountain1, mansion with snake1, Big Clocktower2, historical plant pipe1, aquaduct1, castle walls1, waterwheel (mavra)1	42
Gastronomy and Entertainment	4: Aslamaci1, peddler2, tinsmith1	6: Karatas beaches1, sea1, Seyhanriver4	10: taste2, eating1, drinking1, havingrest1, festival place1, theatre2, fortune-telling1, festival1	10: fish1, salgam1, Turkish delight1, aslama1, tea set1, coffeeshop (kahvehane)1, tea2, boiler1, orange blossom1	30
Total	74	79	108	114	

Conclusions

As a tourism destination brand, for Adana city, stories can be based for strategic destination identity development, branding and marketing. As a conclusion of this study, findings revealed from 26 Adana stories used as data source can be listed as below:

- Stories related to a destination can be effectively used in theme development and promotion campaign.
- A storytelling approach can be used for strategic destination identity development, branding and marketing in long term, multi-actor and multi-level process.
- In order to have impact on destination branding by storytelling, the destination management organisation must establish active multidisciplinary group efforts in tourism industry.
- In order to realize successful communication between visitors and destination, the stories must be transmitted by verbs, objects, experiences, places and characters.
- Storytelling efforts may rise local community awareness and thus be important for strategic destination identity development, branding and marketing.
- Stories can be used as a framework for organizing destination components like transport, hotel and restaurant if they convey the core values of a destination. In this point, the stories turn out to be verbal and visual metaphors which represent the all proposals.
- Adana destination stories put forward “Objects” dominates other categories according to observation scores.
- Using “locality” or a theme reflecting local original/unique/genuine/distinctive qualities in destination brand communication is much more favourable than others.
- Strategically agreement on theme determination and implementation decision is a must.

A review of the literature finds that inadequate published research has analyzed the storytelling aspects and outcomes in relation to destination branding. Our research contributes to the literature in that it analyzes the relatively recent phenomenon of destination brand communication by storytelling.

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